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T7 Task Force Global health

POLICY BRIEF

GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION TOWARDS PLANETARY HEALTH

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Abstract

We are at a tipping point: the health of the world's people and the health of the planet's natural resources on which all life depends are facing unprecedented threats. The human led drivers of economic development, industry and globalisation are causing climate change, pollution of air, soil and water, and biodiversity loss year after year, and these in turn are destroying the animal and human health gains of the last century. In the Anthropocene where humankind have made the world an insecure and precarious place to live, planetary health provides a framework to take rapid, globally-connected action, setting a system in place which can steer the individual investments towards universal health coverage, pandemic preparedness, climate neutrality, clean air, and the reduction of poverty and inequality. The common goal of healthy people flourishing on a healthy planet, which is the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals, is a necessary pursuit. To achieve this we suggest that the G7 utilises planetary health to create a global framework expanding on One Health initiatives. Such a framework can be supported by the G7 in the form of i) better coordination between health and environmental agencies, ii) the development of standards and indicators for planetary health, iii) the better alignment of new global health monitoring initiatives and iv) the prioritization of planetary health in the new pandemic treaty.

Challenges

We are at a watershed moment in history. The concerted drive of human activity, while achieving many developmental gains, is simultaneously destroying the planetary systems upon which all of life depends. The crossing of the [planetary boundaries](#) described by the Stockholm Resilience Institute results in negative impacts which are increasingly harmful to health, and directly and indirectly costly to economies (Steffen et al. 2015). In the Anthropocene in which we now live we can no longer address human, and animal health, and its healthcare systems on their own; they are intricately interconnected to water and air pollution, land degradation, ocean acidification, the over-exploitation of resources, and the climate, food, and ecological systems. A new cross-sectoral approach, working to stay within planetary boundaries, is needed that will secure the health and wellbeing of people and their environment around the globe.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been cataclysmic, locally and globally. The pandemic demonstrated that a highly infectious disease impacts all life supporting systems, and no single state can manage alone. A local outbreak rapidly became a global crisis. Alongside this very visible pandemic a series of *silent pandemics* including mental ill-health, antimicrobial resistance (AMR), hidden hunger, and obesity, alongside challenges such as climate change and violent conflict, are shaping all societies and leading to the convergence of multiple crises, each exacerbating the other. Ecosyndemics are also on the rise. These are disease interactions that are the product of anthropogenic-induced environmental change (Singer, 2013, p.100), resulting in worsening respiratory health, increasing cases of cancers, or poorer mental health. The drivers of these diseases have been damaging the health of humans and the planet for a long time now. And the resultant effect of the cumulative losses, and desecration of our habitat is an unparalleled rise in uncertainty, fear, distrust and insecurity ([UNDP 2022](#)). We have mortgaged the future health of people and planet for the development gains of the present, and COVID-19 has stripped many of these gains away revealing and reinforcing systems of inequality, inequity and injustice.

Planetary Health as a framework sits at the nexus of the collective crises of health, biodiversity, economy, environment, and climate. It provides an inherent rationale for cross disciplinary decision-making on the social, economic and environmental issues that impact on the health of people and the biosphere. While setting out the adaptation and mitigation strategies needed to reduce the impact of the collective crises on human health, planetary health also looks for a transformative approach to synergistically identify and apply equitable solutions. It recognises the need for the convergence of diverse disciplines, and the urgency to do so.

Building on the current One Health Approach, which examines the ways in which food safety, zoonotic outbreaks, and antibiotic resistance impact on health outcomes (WHO, 2017),ⁱ we propose that the G7 utilises planetary health to create a global framework expanding on the significant One Health initiatives (see previous G7 health ministers' communiqués: [2017](#), [2019](#), [2021](#)). Such a framework should have the institutional and organisational capacity to simultaneously tackle the detrimental drivers of the crises while nurturing the health of humans, animals, and the biosphere with its multiple ecosystems.

Proposals

1. Better coordination for planetary health

Building on existing recommendations of the G7 (e.g. [communiqué 2021](#)) for better coordination between the global agencies including WHO, FAO, OIE, UNEP, there is a unique opportunity for the G7 to facilitate multi agency decision-making and to respond to the challenge laid out in the [UNDP report *New threats to Human Security*](#). A coherent approach at multiple levels taking a planetary health perspective and streamlining planetary health into global health architecture is urgently needed. The activities should aim at strengthening the coordination between the [Quadripartite](#) partners (WHO, FAO, OIE, UNEP) for safeguarding planetary health and building on the experiences of the [One Health High Level Expert Panel](#) (OHHLEP). They could provide strategic directions for other countries in strengthening integration and coordination across sectors and at local, national, regional and global levels.

2. Development of standards and indicators for planetary health

Moving beyond a conceptual approach to advance actions for planetary health requires the development of standards and indicators relevant to planetary health that capture the scope, spatial, and time scales of changes to natural systems affecting human health and wellbeing (Pongsiri et al. 2019). A fortified evidence base on planetary health solutions, including their costs, trade-offs, and effects could accelerate the development, prioritisation, coordination, and implementation of key policy actions to protect planetary health at local, national, regional, and global levels.

Planetary health indicators should be built on existing indicators (e.g. indicators of the *Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change* and the *Planetary Health Watch initiative*) in order to avoid duplication and to enable additional questions to be addressed, for example, the extent to which social and economic progress in a given country is based on unsustainable exploitation of natural systems and whether specific groups are disproportionately negatively affected. Important policy needs include using indicators to track environmental and health trends over time and detecting signals of natural system instabilities that portend health risks. The outputs and outcomes of monitoring and reporting of the planetary health standards and indicators can help ensure the design of effective policy, targets, and actions (Pongsiri et al. 2019).

3. Better alignment of new global health monitoring initiatives

It is necessary that institutions work towards a coherent planetary health monitoring system with planetary health indicators at the center. Currently, many emergent institutions on health monitoring as reaction to the pandemic risk duplicating and fragmenting existing monitoring efforts. Institutes like the [Global Pandemic Radar](#) of the UK, the [Berlin-based pandemic and epidemic intelligence hub](#) and the new Pandemic Prevention institute by [The Rockefeller Foundation](#) could complement each other if the G7 push to ensure coherence and to establish a truly global network of experts and institutions that also focus on planetary health. This should also include the EU with the activities on the EU-FAO Technical Dialogue, the European Green Deal with its 'Farm to Fork' Strategy.

4. Making planetary health a priority in the ongoing debate about the new pandemic treaty

The current COVID-19 pandemic highlights how the legally binding International Health Regulations (IHR), which set out the duties of countries to “prevent, detect and respond” to pandemics, [fail to incentivize](#) all governments to stick to their terms, e.g. sharing information of infectious disease outbreaks with the wider world since countries risk travel and trade restrictions. The failure of the IHRs to effectively control the spread of COVID-19 is one such problem that is used to justify the need for a new treaty (Wenham et al. 2022). In the last World Health Assembly (WHA) special session member states came to consensus that it is now required to bring the political commitment to the technical knowhow which already exists to mitigate future challenges in preventing, detecting, responding to, and recovering from pandemic events. They agreed on developing a new instrument – a pandemic treaty or framework convention for pandemic preparedness and response developed and negotiated under WHO constitution by an intergovernmental negotiating body (INB).

This new pandemic treaty is an opportunity to include planetary health and to accord on it as a comprehensive premise for determining collective, connected action on pandemic prevention. This should contain first steps on agreeing on indicators and goals to preserve planetary health that also include ethical environmental standards for government agencies and corporations.

To do so, WHO would need to govern health in and with other regimes, e.g., animal health and environmental issues and biodiversity implications of pathogen sharing under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, Convention on Biological Diversity, Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Framework and the Nagoya Protocol, UN Convention to Combat Desertification. To be able to do that, WHO needs to be empowered and sustainably financed.

Implementation

1. Better coordination for planetary health

Planetary Health requires an enhanced role of international agencies along with national bodies that goes beyond the focus on human health and reactive measures. The G7 presidency should set up a *task force* of G7 and G20 representatives for assessing possibilities of how to improve coordination between the different agencies, using planetary health as framework to address interconnected challenges. One potential point that needs to be discussed is whether the WHO should take a leading role in coordinating between the different agencies. The task force should in particular focus on achieving a better coordination for planetary health between the partners of the [Quadripartite](#) (WHO, FAO, OIE and UNEP) that links human health, animal health and environmental challenges (such as climate change and biodiversity loss) and aims to strengthen the One Health approach.

2. Development of standards and indicators for planetary health

Effective governance and institutional capacity provided by the G7 countries will be required to develop planetary health standards/indicators. G7 governments can take a lead and coordinate among each other in

order to drive the process for the development of planetary health indicators. As an initial step, G7 governments should request their national public health institutes that are members of the IANPHI (International Association of National Public Health Institutes) network to jointly develop planetary health standards/indicators. The IANPHI network has 111 member institutes in 94 countries and recently has published a [roadmap](#) for action on health and climate change. G7 governments and their respective member institutes could leverage the network to push for a similar roadmap on planetary health and discuss/coordinate new indicators to develop global standards for planetary health.

3. Better alignment of new global health monitoring initiatives

G7 governments should better align their current initiatives and institutes that focus on global health monitoring systems and surveillance as a reaction to the pandemic. The many emergent institutions on health monitoring risk duplicating and fragmenting existing monitoring efforts making it difficult to establish a truly global network of experts and institutions that also include and streamline planetary health. The G7 governments should request from their national institutes to ensure coherence and coordination among each other. The establishment of a coordination board or network consisting of the different institutes might be necessary. Importantly, the new institutes and initiatives should avoid doubling already established health monitoring systems and focus on the monitoring and surveillance gaps revealed by the pandemic including planetary health indicators (G7 have already committed to strengthening surveillance systems and preventive measures at the human-animal interface, [2021](#)). The better alignment of the new global health monitoring initiatives between the G7 countries can also become a leading example for new monitoring initiatives of countries outside the G7.

4. Making planetary health a priority in the ongoing debate in the new pandemic treaty

The G7 should bring the debates around planetary health and the pandemic treaty together and include a variety of international agencies including experts and the intergovernmental negotiating body (INB). Proponents of the treaty push to address potential pandemic sources using the concept of One Health and Planetary Health and ‘deep prevention’ to include antimicrobial resistance, zoonoses, climate adaptation and mitigation and accidental pathogen release into the content discussion of a pandemic treaty (Wilson et al. 2021; Vinuales et al. 2021). A planetary health approach to pandemic prevention and preparedness must seek to remedy the inherent limitations in the IHR by linking human, animal, and environmental health. Institutionalizing planetary health in a prospective pandemic treaty would harness multisectoral collaboration to establish integrated surveillance and early warning systems, build global health monitoring frameworks based on planetary health indicators and methodology, and effectively address cross-sectoral challenges of AMR, food insecurity, and climate change (Ruckert et al. 2021).

Disclaimer:

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Endnotes

¹ [One Health \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int)

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